

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Bruce Wilson (BW)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Bruce recounts his time in San Francisco during WWII, a trip to Mexico, summer jobs, the Yosemite backcountry, a 1946 Salmon and Snake river trip, classmates at Stanford Bill Beer and John Daggett, the Bohemian Club, and his career with Kaiser Aluminum

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TM: Today is January 14th, 2019. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Bruce Wilson. My name is Tom Martin. This is a phone interview. Good morning Bruce, how are you today?

BW: Good Morning, I'm fine Tom.

TM: Great. May we have your permission to record this conversation?

BW: Yes, of course.

TM: Thank you so much. Gosh. Thank you for such an incredible interview talking about the 1942 river trip through the Grand Canyon when you were 12. We kinda left off, at the end of that trip you took your first plane ride back to San Francisco. That was in 1942, then how did things work out for you during the Second World War then?

BW: Well, of course I was in school. I finished grammar school and started high school. The country was on what we called 'war time' so they moved the clocks back a couple of hours or ahead a couple of hours. So we walked to Burlingame High School by moonlight because quite a few of the teachers were working the swing shift at the shipyards up at south San Francisco and other war industries. My dad had an insatiable thirst for travel. He was always looking for story ideas, I'm sure that's why although he didn't talk about it that way, but as I recall in 1943 he decided we should take a trip to Mexico because we couldn't travel across any oceans. So we took the train to Nogales. We were supposed to take a First Class Mexican train from Nogales. We were supposed to connect with the equivalent of the stateside train and take the nice Mexican train to Guadalajara but we missed the connection. The trains were, of course, mostly hauling war stuff so the schedules were always screwed up. We got to Nogales, we missed the train and the only train we could get was a local that went from the Mexico side of Nogales to Guadalajara. There was no dining car on it. I think it was a 3-day trip. So we all scrambled in the little shops there at the border town and picked up canned pineapple and I remember canned peaches and stuff like that that we could carry. We got on this train and, of course, it was three days without a dining car.

We soon were... Every time the train stopped—it stopped at every cactus it seemed like [laughs]—there'd be somebody out there on the platform shouting “lunche carne.” It was obviously... We'd been warned about the quick apple green trots while traveling in Mexico, but eventually we got hungry enough so we dove into the local food. Dad didn't want us to drink the water on the train, so he had us drinking beer. [laughs] My sister, who was four years older and I were full of beer and lunche carne all the way to Guadalajara. Of course we were sick as could be. [laughs] We did have an interesting trip to Mexico. I remember that as one experience through the war, that was the summer of 1943. Then the summer of 1944, of course all of the resorts in the mountains country of California were barely able to get people to operate them, so I got a summer job cleaning tent cabins at a resort called Drakesbad which is up in the Mount Lassen National Park area outside of a little town called Chester, California. Was about 17 miles on a dirt road in from Chester, California. I worked there for the summer making beds. They had potties under the beds so I was cleaning out the potties in the morning.

TM: Bedpans. Okay, yeah.

BW: But it was a fun summer because I met some other young people who I kept running into later on both at Stanford and some of them were at Cal where my future wife was. So that was a fun summer. Then the summer of 1945 I turned 16., that was the summer the war ended, I spent a month up in the Yosemite backcountry with friends Bill and Tom Rieger. Bill was a year older than me and Tom was a year younger than me. You could rent a donkey for a dollar a day from the Yosemite stables. We just took off into the backcountry. Every once in a while we'd come back into Yosemite Valley and get a milkshake and reprovision, then we'd go out again. We ended the summer at a place called Benson Lake which is north of Yosemite Valley but still in the park. It has a little sand beach and lots of mosquitos. That last week of our summer out there our fathers, our dads, came, Neill and Tom Rieger Sr. who was his good friend. Then my dad and I hiked out of Benson Lake to a campsite called White Wolf which is on the road to Tuolumne Meadows. It was about a 25 mile hike from Benson to White Wolf. You know, I thought my dad was ancient. I think he was probably 56 or so. I don't know what he was, but in 1945 I thought he was ancient. I'd just turned 16. So I thought this 25 mile hike would kill him, and I'd been out in the mountains all summer. By the time we got to White Wolf I was just dragging and my dad was just full of pep. He was an amazing guy. He kidded me, he says, “Aren't you going to go to the dance tonight?” I can remember, I could barely move. We saw that highway that runs by White Wolf and there were lots of cars on it. That was a big surprise to us because, you know, gas had been rationed and nobody could get out and take pleasure trips during the war because of the gas rationing. And here all of a sudden the highway was full of cars and we said, “What's going on?” and they said, “Well, don't you know the war is over? Japan surrendered, they blew off atomic bombs!” We didn't even know any of that had happened. I was terribly disappointed because I missed the big party in downtown San Francisco that was going on when the war ended. But that was a memorable summer. Of course that was before my senior year in high school. I thought, oh boy I'll be able to get gas for the car. I couldn't wait to get back to civilization. That was a fun summer.

BW: The Rieger family, there were two older brothers. They were my dad's generation. There was Paul and Tom and they were brothers, and they lived in Berkley. They were contemporaries also of Otis Marston. I'm sure they all knew each other. My dad used to spend a lot of time in the mountains with the Rieggers and we used to do a lot of skiing with the Rieger family. Bill Rieger who was a year older than I, he just loved the mountains. He was sort of a pushy guy but he was very capable. So he and his younger brother Tommy and I just had a terrific summer together. They had racks you that could put on these donkeys. We only had one donkey, but you could pack your sleeping bags on it and everything and you could hike and didn't have to carry a bunch of stuff on your back.

TM: Okay. So did you climb Half Dome or go to the top of Bridal Veil Falls? I mean that high country up there is just gorgeous!

BW: Oh yeah it's gorgeous. We didn't climb Half Dome. We stayed on the trails mostly but we went all over both on the north rim and the south rim in Yosemite. We went up to Merced Lake and then beyond and up Red Mountain and Illilouette Canyon where the golden trout are. On the north rim we went to Benson Lake. We just wandered for weeks.

TM: Did you run into anybody else out there?

BW: Very, very few. We saw very, very few people. We were just high school kids, three high school kids. You wonder whether parents will even let their kids do that. I can't. I have no idea what made my dad let me do these things. But they probably were figuring... I wouldn't be surprised they were figuring, look these kids might be in the war. This would be good for them. So they let us go and let us do it. We just had a great summer.

TM: Nice.

BW: Just terrific. Then later on when our children were growing up, Bill Rieger and I took our families on numerous trips in the woods with pack animals. One time we, I forget what year that was but it was much, much later, we hiked from Yosemite down to Mammoth Lakes over Donahue Pass. Just beautiful country. Spectacular. So we spent a lot of time in the mountains.

TM: Excellent. So the War's over in '45, you're starting your senior year in high school '45/'46.

BW: That's correct.

TM: And your dad is still thinking about river running.

BW: He is still thinking about river running. He's not talking about it very much. He was always looking for ideas for stories. He was an adventurous guy but he was not the guy that talked about it very much. Most of these trips, there wouldn't be any big buildup. He usually would wait till I was asleep and then he'd come in and wake me up and say, "Hey we're leaving in a couple days. We're gonna go do this. We're gonna go do that." It made it all the more fun. [laughs] I guess he'd stayed in touch with Norm and they were working up his trip down the Idaho rivers, the Salmon and the Snake. I had a job that summer of 1946. I had a summer job as a copy boy on the San Francisco Examiner.

TM: Oh wow!

BW: That was just a super job for a kid.

TM: Talk about that. What did you do?

BW: You came up there and you sat on a bench. Directly behind the bench there were three machines where the Western Union wire would come in and the resonator was a tin tobacco can. The things were rattling banggity, banggity, bang, and there were spittoons on the floor. It was a real old-time city newsroom. The city editors, the night editor, depending what shift you're on, were sitting at one end of the room and all the reporters were out in this big bullpen. That killed all my thoughts of ever being a journalist. [laughs] All these reporters had hearing aids and potbelly's, and looked like they weren't

making much money. But there was always something exciting going on. You'd sit on the bench and if somebody would finish their story they'd yell "boy!" and you'd run over and get the news thing from their typewriter and take it to the city desk. The city editor was a guy named Switzer. He used to send... He had a standing order for coffee with whiskey in it down at Breen's Saloon on Third Street, down at the bottom of the building. Breen's was one of these old-fashioned bars with a big mahogany bar. Of course, we weren't old enough to buy liquor, the copy boys, but the bartender would put Mr. Switzer's coffee mug at the end of the bar. It had a shot of whiskey in it but he'd pour coffee on top of it. We'd go down when he'd send us for coffee. We were never supposed to ask in any detail what kind of coffee he wanted, we were supposed to know. We would go down to the Breen's bar and pick up his cup of coffee with a shot in it, bring it back up to him. I spent part of the time in the sports department, that was really fun, too.

TM: How so?

BW: They'd send you out to the various places, the City Hall or the Hall of Justice to pick up news things that the reporter that was stationed there would write. You were running all over San Francisco, it was great.

TM: So you were picking up stories that reporters were writing and bringing them back to the newspaper to get them tabulated up into the papers for printing?

BW: Yeah. Including the early days for the San Francisco 49ers football team on Sundays. They played at old Kezar Stadium in Golden Gate Park in the fog. One of my jobs was to go out there and go to the press box and pick up the stories, especially the captions for the magic...they called it a magic eye camera or something, that took a sequence of pictures of the quarterback going back and Frankie Albert throwing the ball. Before the end of the game they wanted to get that stuff back to get into the evening editions. So I'd get on the streetcar, go back to the Examiner Building which was on the corner of 3rd Street and Market. That was really an exciting job. I really didn't want to leave that to go on the river trip. I looked forward to the river trip but I really enjoyed that job. I was a little bit torn that summer, but the trip was planned, and off we went.

TM: Okay. So dad said, "You're going. Pack your bags let's go."

BW: Let's go. I recall, I'm quite sure this is right, my mother...we drove up there, the whole family. My sister, who is four years older, had just graduated from Stanford and she was in love. She eventually married the boy. He was a wonderful guy named Dick Hinze. Nan really didn't want to make that trip. She didn't want to be driving off to Idaho instead of seeing her boyfriend. She was really bad company in that car. We didn't have air conditioning or anything. We would drive through eastern Oregon, wherever those roads were to get to Salmon city in Idaho. I think eventually she and my mother came back to California which was the sensible thing to do. I really don't remember how my dad and I got back from Idaho at the end of the trip because I don't think that my mother stayed around, I'm sure she didn't, but it's a little bit vague in my mind.

TM: I know that--I don't know but I think that Dock drove back, so you guys might have just piled in and headed back with him.

BW: Yeah, although I don't remember that. I don't remember that happening. That would've been a pretty full car because you had the two girls and Margaret was with them. So there were four of them.

TM: Yeah that's right, it would've been...

BW: My dad and me were six, it would have been a crowded car. Cars weren't that big in those days. I don't think we did. We probably took a train. We didn't fly. I'd sure remember that.

TM: So your sister is not happy, she doesn't wanna go. You don't sound like you're really keen on going either, you were pulled out from your job, and it's a long drive up there to...

BW: Long, hot drive. [laughs]

TM: Yeah, and the roads are of course, two lane. I'm assuming they were asphalt but maybe bumpy here and there, traffic and lots of slow trucks and agricultural equipment.

BW: Yeah probably so. We had a 1938 Chevy through the war, but we also had a 1941 Oldsmobile. It was probably that 1941 Oldsmobile that we were in. It didn't have air conditioning, didn't have a radio. It was just transportation.

TM: What you saw was what you got.

BW: That's right.

TM: So finally to the river at last, it sounds like you guys did the Salmon first.

BW: Yes. Definitely we did the Salmon first. We left from Salmon city. That was a nice little town. I don't remember much about it except that we all met up there and we got the boats and took off. The Salmon, that was just beautiful country. It was, you know, clear water. It wasn't a big silt carrier at all. And, of course, the water was much colder than the water in the Colorado had been. But there were forests that came down. It was a very pretty river.

TM: Do you remember taking a flight before the river trip to kind of scout out the river at all?

BW: No I don't. The only thing... I think you and I have talked about this Tom, I remember when we got to Lewiston at the end of the first run—we ran down the Salmon till it ran into the Snake and then down into the town of Lewiston—I went up in a little plane with Norm Nevills. He let me take the controls and fly the plane for a couple of minutes, but that's the only time I was in a plane on that trip. Otie, I think maybe Otie had done a reconnoitering of the river from a plane but we were not with him.

TM: Okay, Alright. So big trees coming right down to the water's edge, and the river is clear and cold.

BW: The feeling that it left with me was not really big trees, 'cause you know, when I think big trees I think of Redwoods and stuff like that. But it was just green, very green in contrast to California which, of course, in the summertime is pretty brown. It was just really green and it was forested. I couldn't tell you what kind of trees they were but it was just lush. It was really pretty country.

TM: At one point, it seems like you guys stopped, actually at a number of places, where local families were living along the river. I don't know if you remember those events at all?

BW: Yes. I don't remember a lot of specifics but that is true. There were people that were sort of like hillbilly families that were living off the land. They were always very hospitable. I don't recall any of them that weren't really hospitable. They seemed glad to see some new faces come by and they'd invite us in. One time, maybe you and I talked about this once, I remember we went into a family and we were

sitting around at their table in their kitchen. A very simple abode out there in the middle of nowhere. My dad was sitting in the chair at the table and a little kid, he must not have been more than three or four years old, one of the little kids comes up and he stares up at my father. The little boy sticks out his jaw and he says, "This son of a bitch is sitting in my chair!" [laughs] We all really laughed. I remember that. And I remember there was a family that had two or three girls, young girls. They were all so self-sufficient. They lived off the land and they were enjoying their life.

TM: Were these the young women that were on horses? They rode across the river. They must've been teenagers.

BW: Yeah I think they were. I think they were. I'm sure that all of that was the inspiration, if I can use that word, for a novel that my dad wrote later.

TM: Oh interesting.

BW: Yeah, called Deep Down River. His novels weren't big sellers, but I got a copy of it here on my desk. I'm sure that he got a lot of ideas from that trip for stories that he had both for a book like that and he had a lot of hillbilly stories in the Saturday Evening Post. And all that stuff he could weave into his background for stories.

TM: There was a hermit named Andy.

BW: Yeah, I don't remember him specifically to tell you the truth. I know who you're talking about because I've read your transcript. I'm sure that occurred. I can imagine it occurred, but I don't remember any specifics about Andy. We met a bunch of characters along the way.

TM: Well it sounds like your trip itself had a bunch of characters on it. What do you remember about Norm during those trips?

BW: Well Norm was always the leader and to me he was an outstanding figure. I looked up to him and almost in awe of him. He was always fun, he had a good sense of humor. He was the cook and we all pitched in to get the firewood and to scrub the pots and that sort of thing. But Norm, he was in charge and he was a great guy.

TM: And Otie was there with his wife Margaret.

BW: Margaret, she didn't go all the way on the boats. I think she was driving their car along the road and then she'd meet us from time to time when the road would come close to the river.

TM: What do you remember of her?

BW: Well she was a real nice lady. She was very tan. She was thin and she was a little bit wrinkled, I think she was a heavy smoker, but she was a really nice gal. A really nice woman and I liked her very much.

TM: Nice. Otie and Mags twin daughters, Mala and Lolo [Loel] were on that trip. What do you remember of them?

BW: Well, Loel and Maradel, they were great company. We were pretty close to the same age. That's why I questioned earlier what their age really was because I don't think they were that much older than I was, a year or two maybe. They were not Hollywood beauties but they were definitely girls. [laughs]

TM: So you were interested?

BW: Yeah. They were fun and we got along very well. I think maybe Loel was a little more outgoing than Maradel but they were good company and I enjoyed their being there.

TM: Fun.

BW: Yep, it was good.

TM: And then, Pres Walker?

BW: Pres, again, he was somebody that I looked up to from the earlier trip. Very competent. We all knew that he was fighting his drinking problem, but he was just a great guy to be with and really good with the boats. When we transported the boats from the end of the Salmon River leg that summer, we transported them over to the Snake for our second run, he and I and Kent Frost... I don't know if there was anyone else, I think it was just he and I and Kent Frost took those boats over. That was a memorable night to me because Pres produced a bottle of whiskey and we all took a big shot of it. That probably was not a good thing for Pres, it wasn't a good thing for me as a seventeen year old either. [laughs] I remember, Kent I don't think I was much of a drinker but he was a guy who had... He had been given some award. I don't know who made the award or what the award was but he was the Frontiersman of the Year or something like. He was one of these people who could run 50 miles over the mountains barefoot and eat off the land, and all that sort of thing. Quite a remarkable human being really. He was in great shape. Just built like a wire.

TM: What do you remember about his personality? Was he kind, was he talkative?

BW: He was not very talkative, but he was kind and he had a sense of humor. He had a little twang to his speech and he was a fun guy to be with. He was a very good boatsman. He handled the oars... He was thin but just strong as he could be, very impressive.

TM: Nice. And then there were a couple other passengers that were on the trip that were friends of Norm or had done river trips earlier with Norm or who knew Otie. I don't know if you remember any of them or not.

BW: Well, I remember there were two women on the trip. One of them, Pauline Saylor, I really don't remember anything about her at all. June Chamberlain, I remember her. I was kind of surprised she was on the trip. She didn't strike you as being a real outdoorsy type of person. But she was a nurse and I think she was from Santa Rosa. As I recall, she must have had some skin allergy or she was really worried about the sun. A lot of the time she wore a net over her face, from under her hat down over face, so she looked like a beekeeper. I'm pretty sure that was June and not Pauline. I could be wrong but I think it was June. She always looked like a beekeeper with this thing hanging down over her face. But she was a good sport. I don't know how those ladies found any privacy but they must have done so. They were good company on the trip.

TM: Did you keep in touch with Pauline or June after the trip at all?

BW: No. I remembered we talked about it with June. I remember because Santa Rosa was pretty close to where we lived. In fact later on, my parents moved up to Sonoma County. They were about 15 miles west from Santa Rosa. We talked about getting together with her but I don't recall that we ever did, at least I didn't. Maybe my dad did but I never did. After that trip I went on to college, and life went on.

TM: Yeah. So once the Salmon was done, it was off to the Hells Canyon part of the Snake. The Snake is pretty wide and open for quite a while but then it necks up for this 40 or 50 mile section of canyon called Hells Canyon. Then it joins the Salmon and goes down to Lewiston which you guys had already been to. I guess the one thing that was most remarkable for me about the Hells Canyon run was Pres's flip there in Buck Creek rapid. Do you remember that at all?

BW: I don't remember. I really don't remember it. I remember that he flipped but I don't remember. I don't feel that surge of excitement going through me from... I know I was there and I know it happened. That whole trip in 1946, it didn't make the impression on me that the Colorado trip made. That's not a put-down of it, of the Salmon and Snake River trips, they were both great trips, but I think maybe because I was 17 instead of 13 and I was headed off for college and I had all these other things that go through a kid's mind at that age, I didn't realize at the time and savor the experience that I was having as much as I probably should have. Since you and I have been in contact, I been kind of searching the recesses of my failing old brain for memories of that trip and I don't come up with many real clear pictures. It's in there somewhere. [laughs]

TM: It sounds normal for a 17-year-old that really wanted to be somewhere else.

BW: I wasn't pining away for other places, but I just had a lot of good things that I could do and a lot of fun things. I was doing something that was fun but I could've been doing something else that was fun. [laughs] So it was just sort of that's where I was.

TM: Is there anything else you remember about that river trip that I haven't asked you or that you recall?

BW: Yeah. I don't think that my dad and I were with the boats at the very end when they got to Lewiston the second time. I think we got off before that and worked our way home, however the heck we did, and I don't know why. I don't know whether my dad had some other schedule or something else to do. There are other people on the trip that were there part-time. A man named Dodge, I think Harry Dodge, and his daughter Ferris.

TM: That's right. Yep.

BW: She was a nice gal. She was, of course, older than the twins. She was an attractive young woman, I remember. But they weren't there the whole time. I don't recall the details of when they hooked up, how they hooked up, but they were definitely there for part of the time. I remember old Howard Welty. He was kind of a windbag. He got on people's nerves. At some point we were all riding in the back of a stake truck, a flatbed truck with wooden stakes around the flat bed. I don't know what was prompting that, but I remember we were all in the truck and we were being jostled as we went over the bumps. So everybody was, including my father, which surprised me, even at the time surprised me 'cause my dad was a very gentle person, but we were all kind of bumping into Howard Welty and kind of banging him around which was mean and small and not very nice. I think he'd got to be a little bit too much for most of us, but I remember that. But generally speaking everybody got along just fine.

TM: Yes, Howard had a reputation of being a talker.

BW: Yeah, he was definitely. He was a gasbag, [laughs] but I'm sure he was a very nice decent man. My father was such a tolerant person. I can't imagine him ever going out of his way to push anybody around, just completely contrary to his personality. But I do remember that stake truck. Me and my dad was going "Whoopee!", banging into old Howard. Oh well, that was a long time ago.

TM: Yes it was. Was that your last river running experience then or did you go on to run more rivers?

BW: That was it. My wife and daughter and son and I did a little short ride down the American River up here in the gold country in California in a rubber raft, but that was just a day outing. Well, I think we slept outside one night. Aside from that, that's the last river I ever ran.

TM: What year was that?

BW: I couldn't tell you. I mean, it was more recent, my children were adults.

TM: Like in the 1970s or 60s even?

BW: Yeah probably later than that. I really don't remember. My daughter was married.

TM: Did you tell the river guides on that trip that you'd been through Grand Canyon in 1942?

BW: No. [laughs]

TM: Oh you should've! They would've fallen off the back of their boats.

BW: The only similar thing is—and that was the only other time I was in a river—we took a hiking trip with an outfit called Sobek I think, Mountain Sobek...

TM: That's right.

BW: ...and we took a trip down to the Copper Canyon in Mexico where we went down into the canyon. A lot of people go on a railroad and then look down into Copper Canyon. Mary Louise and I and our son Steve went down into the Copper Canyon with these guys. One of the guides in other times of the year, he was running boats down the Colorado River. So he was really interested and we talked a lot. He always said, "I'll get in touch with you and we'll have you come over to some meeting or something." But I never heard from him. So that was one thing. And then one time Mary Louise and I flew into the airport at Phoenix. We were on the plane, we were reading the airline magazine, and the airline magazine talked about some get-together of Colorado river runners that was taking place at Lees Ferry and it happened to be that week. So had we changed our plans—we were just going to be driving around Painted Desert and things like that—we changed our plans and we drove over to Lees Ferry and walked in on this gathering. Some of the rangers were seated, there were big picnic tables, were seated at the same table and one of them said, "What are you doing here?" I told him and he was interested. So he interviewed me and I think I sent him a copy of that 1942 journal. I think he was with the Park Service at Lake Powell, I'm not sure. We had a brief correspondence but nothing ever came of that that I'm aware of. He told me that one of Norm Nevills' daughters works at Lake Powell, I think.

TM: Yes, at Page.

BW: But those are the only other things that ever occurred that tied me to the Colorado River. I've never done much talking about it. A couple of guys who were in my class at Stanford who I knew casually, we weren't real close friends but I knew, Bill Beer and a guy named Daggett, they swam down the river sometime in the...must've been in the 50s I would guess, I'm not sure.

TM: Now I'm putting on the breaks and now I'm backing up. Wait a minute. Bill Beer and I think Dan Daggett?

BW: I think it was John Daggett.

TM: Maybe John, okay. They ended up writing a book called *We Swam Grand Canyon*. Which was a really wonderful, well written book. Were you a contemporary classmate with them in Stanford?

BW: Yeah, yeah. I knew Bill Beer better than I knew Daggett. In fact, when Beer ran for some student body office, at the time there was an advertising campaign for Lord Calvert whiskey that had very distinguished people sitting in great big leather chairs like they would be in the Bowser Club. Then it was "Men of distinction enjoy Lord Calvert" or something like that was the thing. He had me pose and he had a photographer take my picture. Here I am in an old pair of torn blue jeans and a dirty tee shirt and I'm sitting in this big easy chair holding a beer and it says "Men of distinction are for Beer". [laughs] He won the election. I kept a copy of that picture and had it framed in a silver frame, sterling silver frame, and I gave it to my mother for Christmas and she was horrified. [laughs]

TM: Oh my gosh.

BW: That's what I was doing at Stanford.

TM: Did you tell Bill about your Grand Canyon run? Did he know?

TM: No, no I don't think so. I don't think he had any clue and I didn't have any clue that he was going to do the swimming thing. It was years later that somebody told me that those two guys had swum down the river. I haven't been in touch with him at all. I mean zero. We've all gone different ways.

TM: What else do you remember about Beer and Daggett from school?

BW: I remember Bill as being a really good guy. Daggett I didn't know as well. I don't think he shows up in our yearbook. I don't know what happened to him. Bill was a good guy. Daggett, I'm sure, was too. I didn't know him as well. I think he might've been a DEKE (Delta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity), well, I'm not sure.

TM: So all this time you're still in connection with Otie through the Bohemian Club or how did that workout? How did you stay in touch with the Marstons through the years?

BW: Well I wasn't in very close touch with them. My dad was a member of the Bohemian Club and he was a contributing member which meant he didn't have to pay the high dues. He would write plays and stuff for shows that they put on, and he would have me as his guest. He put my name up for a membership, it's a very long waiting list. I became a member...well, I was 40 years old so we could figure out what year that was. Forty and 1929, 1969. I saw Otie a few times after that, but I didn't see Otie much at all in the years between 1946 and 1969 or '70 because when I graduated from college in 1950 the Korean War started and I went into the service. I didn't go in until 1951, but I was gone until the end of '53. Then I went to work for Kaiser Aluminum and in 1958 or '59 we went into the international

business in a big way for a variety of reasons too complicated to go into right here. I was shot off to Asia to establish agencies and that sort of thing. So I was traveling and away from home most of the time from 1951 to '61. Then I moved my family out to Tokyo in 1961. I was responsible for our business from Japan over to Pakistan. So I was gone from Japan all the time but I sure as heck was not back in the states. Then I came back. In 1965 we moved back to California for five years, but then Kaiser formed a commodity trading company and they sent me to London. I was in London as managing director, Kaiser Trading over there in Europe, for seven years, didn't come back till 1977. So I didn't spend much time in the states and I didn't spend much time at the Bohemian Club, but I did see Otie a few times at the club. I resigned my membership in 1988 because I'd been put in early retirement and I just couldn't afford it, frankly. I never saw him after that.

TM: I've got a question for you. When you were in London, Otie was researching a gentleman named Ballard who was a Brit and had been on the Stanton trip of 1890.

BW: Really?

TM: Stanton had given his crew members these golden medallions and the family actually still had the thing. They were there in England. You did a little footwork for him there trying to connect him up with the Ballard family.

BW: That's interesting. I don't remember that at all. Absolute blank. I think that Garth and his wife, Shirley, came through London. I hadn't seen Garth in years and years and years. But I think they got in touch with us and we had dinner one evening. Maybe Garth did that digging for his dad. I really don't remember that. Even when we were living in London, I wasn't home all that much anyway. I spent a lot of time in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. We did quite a bit of business, sold alumina to the Russians. I spent a lot of time in Eastern Europe. I really don't remember that.

TM: No worries. It would've been a couple letters that would've crossed your busy desk. But it was interesting that Otie would reach out to friends all across the planet in his search for river history.

BW: I'm sure he was diligent. If there was a rock he'd turn it over. That was good.

TM: What else can you tell me about Otie in the later years?

BW: I felt... The last time that I remember spending any time with him was at the Bohemian Grove. He seemed to me to have mellowed and was a little more relaxed, maybe, and very genial. I always felt that he was a little more critical of Norm Nevills than I was comfortable with. I respected Otie and would never have debated him much on the subject other than to sit there and say I really thought the world of Norm. He was an analytical type of person. He was always analyzing why people did things and how they did things. I guess I'm not that deep a thinker.

TM: Interesting. Yeah. What can you tell me about the Bohemian Club?

BW: Not an awful lot. It's a club that greatly values its privacy but it's certainly nothing sinister. It's a group of people who enjoy the arts and good fellowship. It's true that its membership includes a lot of extremely prominent people in business and government and the arts, but also just plain Joe's like I was, nobody special. Somebody's gotta pay for it. But everybody pitches in and carries a spear in the productions. The great thing about that club is that everything there is off the record and that's why

you'll find a reluctance for people associated with Bohemian Club to talk about it. It's not because they've been sworn to some sort of a mafia secrecy at all. It's nothing like that at all. [laughs] It's just that if you wanna go there and pee against a Redwood tree, you can go and pee against a Redwood tree. And the guy peeing next to you might be Ronald Reagan. [laughs] It's just nice for people to be able to get away. A good friend of mine who was a fraternity brother of mine at Stanford was married to a Supreme Court justice, Sandra Day O'Connor. John was a just great guy and a San Francisco happy-go-lucky Irishman. Also, I think, a very fine attorney. But he'd come to the Grove and just had the time of his life. It was wonderful. He didn't have to be the Supreme Court justice's husband. He could just be John. It was nice.

Of course for me, it was a wonderful opportunity for me to spend time with my dad because I was out of the country so much. I know in 1969 he wrote the Grove play which was a big production. He was the author of it so he was able to invite—this was before my membership came up which was in the fall after the summer camp—but he invited me and my sister's husband, Dick Hinze, to be his guests at the Grove and we got to go to the play and afterwards see him take all the bows and everything which meant a lot to him. I think these guys, these professionals, they treasure the respect of their peers and I think it meant a lot to him to get the congratulations from his peers because there were a lot of very fine writers and very successful guys in their fields who enjoyed his work. It's just that you sit up on the deck and there might be... I know in our camp there was the ambassador to Australia, he was also one of the owners of Sunset Magazine, and his brother. They were good guys. Another was Dean of the Stanford Graduate School of Business; and the chairman of the Wells Fargo Bank at that time. A bunch of very accomplished people but there were also some working stiffs like me who could just sit there and have a drink with them. It's a very nice club.

TM: I know that Otie certainly seemed to be attracted to the arts, the performances. He performed in a number of the plays in fairly leading roles and I think he really enjoyed that camaraderie.

BW: I think he did. It seems to me he had a pretty good singing voice, too. As I recall, he had a nice singing voice.

TM: As somebody said, well, at least he thought he did. [laughs]

BW: Yeah! [laughs] That's well put.

TM: But also it sounded like there were a lot of people who were in the club doing the work. I guess you could get a membership by working.

BW: There are members who are professional members. There are members who are not professionals but who are extremely talented. You can't imagine how many really great piano players there are in the world. There are people...they could be professionals, they're that quality, but they would contribute their time. Then there were people who were doctors and lawyers, who didn't have any particular talents but maybe they'd pitch in and make props for the plays or work in the makeup department. Everybody did something.

TM: So you could decrease or eliminate your dues by donating your time.

BW: You were in a certain category of membership. If you played in the orchestra or played in the band, you would get maybe a reduced cost membership. But it wasn't something you could say, look, I'm putting in some work this year so cut my dues back. It's not like that.

TM: Got it, okay. Just trying to figure this out. Jeff Marston, I don't know if you remember Jeff.

BW: No, I didn't know Jeff.

TM: He was one of Garth's sons.

BW: I never knew any of their kids.

TM: He still is in the club and he's been very helpful to kind of help me understand some of the membership.

BW: It's a really lovely thing. It might be a little bit of an anachronism in this day and age, and it's probably changed and evolved a little bit since I was a member. I haven't been active in it since the late 1980s. It's a San Francisco institution. It used to be completely male, now they have gals in there as waitresses and stuff. It's evolved slowly, but very slowly. It goes at its own pace.

TM: Well it's tradition. You start with tradition and what you do with that.

TM: Otie passed away in 1979. Were you aware of that? It seems as though a lot of people didn't know he had passed away.

BW: Yeah, I did not know. I didn't know it. '79, we were back here from England, but I didn't know it. He was just gone. And I guess maybe when I talked to him at the Grove was close to that time. I couldn't tell you.

TM: Did you see him in the Grove? That would've been June or July of 1979.

BW: It's entirely possible, yeah. I was a member.

TM: I was curious that you might've seen Otie that summer at the Grove in 1979. He had then headed down to Carmel by the Sea. One of the Bohemian friends he had had a place down there. I don't know who that was and there would've been a whole bunch of people who probably had that.

BW: I don't know. I mean, I was a member of the club in 1979. The last time I spoke with him was at the Grove. It could well have been 1979. That's when he was being the host on the bus tour of the property there. He told me stories about how the first time that he had that job he had made a dry run with his predecessor as the guide and host. Then when he got on the bus to take a group of people, they told him they had decided to run the bus in the opposite direction. [laughs] He said it was really difficult to identify everything when you were coming counterclockwise instead of clockwise.

TM: Backwards. Oh my gosh.

BW: I remember that. I don't really remember a lot of details and I couldn't tell you exactly what year it was. But it could well have been 1979.

TM: Do you remember the Otie-o-meter?

BW: No.

TM: I guess that was sort of a truth or fiction kind of meter that Otie ended up known for there in the club. It just sounded like it was a lot of fun.

BW: Well, it's a fun place.

TM: Excellent. Well, Bruce Wilson, thank you so very, very much. Is there anything else you wanna bring to this interview before we wrap it up?

BW: I can't think of anything. I wish that I could just turn the clock back and come up with all sorts of really detailed things about the trip. It was a wonderful time. It was a wonderful experience and it's something I've always treasured and I will continue to treasure. I never made it the centerpiece of my life. I've got other things that were interesting to me, too. But it was great. It's kinda nice to be able to share it. I appreciate all the work you're putting in. I'm just starting to wade through that great big book that you edited of Dock's, the Powell to Power book. I've sworn to myself that I'm gonna read it from cover to cover. I'm almost through the foreword. [laughs] I'm looking forward to it.

TM: Think of Dock's voice when you get into it because you're one of the few people around who would know how that book should sound.

BW: I can picture his voice and I can picture the man and I like him very much. I didn't agree with everything but...

TM: He would've liked it that way.

BW: He had his opinions and he respected other people's opinions, and bless his heart. He's a national treasure there's no question about it.

TM: Well, Bruce Wilson, thank you again so very, very much for this incredible interview. This is going to conclude Part 2 of an oral history interview with Bruce Wilson. Today is January 14, 2019. My name is Tom Martin. Hold the line Bruce.